

Gay Rights & Religion

It is fair to say that almost all organised opposition to full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people comes from religious quarters.

This is not to say that there aren't liberal and gay-friendly religious groups - there are - but one fact is hard to ignore: every single initiative to block legal reforms ending discrimination against LGBT people, and every effort to stop legal equality was driven by the religious lobby.

The major religions may disagree on whose deity is supreme, but they generally all agree that gay people are at best 'damaged' and at worst 'abominations'.

Secular Charter

The creation of a just and equitable secular society in Britain

The National Secular Society seeks a society in which religion and the State are distinctly separated, and where human rights always take precedence over religious demands. We would like to see the following ten objectives incorporated into a written, secular constitution:

- There should be no established state religion.
- The state should not fund religious activities.
- The state should not fund religious proselytising in any form and the provision of all services using public money should be religiously neutral.
- The state should not prescribe, proscribe, or amend religious doctrine.
- The state should not interfere in religious hierarchies, nor interfere in issues strictly related to membership.
- No action by the state should have the primary effect of engaging in religious practice.
- No state action should have the primary effect of restricting religious practice.
- The state should not express any religious beliefs, or in any publication, speech, or other implement of state power such as currency, sworn testimony, oath of fealty to the state, or endorsements of national pride. The state should not imply any derivation of authority from any religious authority, nor should it express temporal supremacy in relation to religious belief or practice.
- Political leaders should not express religious preferences in the course of their duties.
- No religion or denomination should have the power to prescribe, proscribe, or amend civil or common law.

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The
RELIGIOUS
ONSLAUGHT
against
GAYS &
LESBIANS

ENGLAND: A CHRISTIAN
HOMOSEXUALITY:
AN ABOMINATION
JESUS: ONLY WAY



The religious onslaught against Gays & Lesbians

Secularists do not care what rules religious groups set for their own members. We are not really interested in, for example, the Church of England's internal debate over women bishops or gay clergy, or whether Catholic priests may marry. How they run their club is their business. As secularists though, we do take a very keen interest in religious interference in issues that affect wider society. When religious groups not only begin to demand that they receive special privileges, but that the law should discriminate against others, then we have to stand up and confront them.

Homosexuality - for reasons that are hard for rational people to understand - seems to excite the most ugly passions in religious organisations.

Gay campaigner Peter Tatchell once said quite provocatively that The Bible, for gay people, was like Mein Kampf. Many Christians would be offended by this statement, but at the same time would see no irony in then citing Leviticus or the Gospel of Paul to condemn lesbian and gay people as an "abomination".

Nevertheless, the problem isn't what religious fundamentalists think of gay people - they're entitled to their opinion - but the way they use their power to campaign against LGBT equality and threaten their well-being.

One of the biggest concessions to the religious lobby was the introduction of separate legislation to handle same-sex partnerships. For the first time in modern history, British law institutionalised a form of apartheid - one law for same-sex

couples and another for heterosexual couples. It is beyond dispute that the only reason why there are separate laws which essentially achieve the same end was to appease religious groups and to preserve the term "marriage" for their exclusive use.

But it goes further. Even as socially progressive laws extend equality and protection to the LGBT community, the religious lobby demands exemptions from these laws.

There has been incredible progress in achieving justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people over the last two decades, but this is no thanks to priests, rabbis and imams who fought it and condemned it every step of the way.

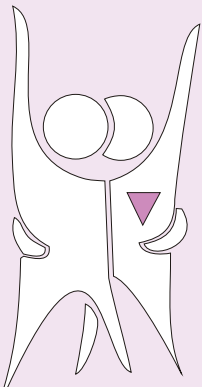
Religious leaders whipped up opposition to the equalisation of the age of consent, the scrapping of Section 28, the adoption of children by same-sex couples, the end to discrimination in the provision of goods and services, and - most bitterly - legal recognition of gay relationships.

Outside of the legal realm, it gets even more frightening. Alarming footage of 'gay exorcisms' in the UK have recently come to light where evangelical church members try to drive 'evil spirits' out of gay teenagers.

Christians run 'bible camps' that seek to 'de-gay' children who don't appear to conform to gender norms, and many gay Muslims admit they fear 'honour killing' by enraged families.

Almost always there are religious motivations behind these attacks on the legal equality, social acceptance and personal dignity of lesbian and gay people.

Want to Fight back?



If you're a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender atheist or humanist and would like to get involved in fighting back against religious intolerance, join the NSS! Also, why not find out more about one of our kindred organisations - **The Gay & Lesbian Humanist Association?** Visit www.galha.org for more information

Can't ban 'em? Change 'em!

The American Psychological Association says there is "no credible evidence that sexual orientation can be changed through 'reparative therapy.'" Their British counterparts say that given the "lack of evidence for the efficacy of such treatments, this is likely to be unwise or even harmful." Yes, so-called "reparative therapies" continue, sponsored - in the UK - chiefly by Christian and Muslim organisations who try to turn gay men and women into heterosexuals, or if that fails, to remain celibate.

One UK organisation, the Courage Trust, gave up after years of trying when its leadership realised what damage they were doing. Less scrupulous groups continue to damage the mental health of LGBT people.

Exemptions: The Church's last stand

Religious lobbyists of all faiths and denominations have fought tooth and nail to hold back legal reforms that sought to end discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Luckily, while they were able to slow down reforms, they were not successful in stopping progress. Over the last decade, discriminatory laws like Section 28 were scrapped, the age of consent was equalised, same-sex couples were allowed to adopt children and ultimately gain legal recognition for their relationships. Church, Mosque, Temple and Synagogue fought these changes to the law every step of the way.

They lost, but they had a fall-back position. In the name of 'compromise' they were much more successful in persuading the government to cave in here. Essentially, they successfully argued that religious groups ought to have "special exemptions" from obeying non-discrimination law.

Religious groups argued that they had a particular 'ethos' and that homosexuality did not fit in with this. Secularists don't really care what religious groups do in private. They can have whatever membership rules they like, but it becomes problematic because in the UK there isn't a clean division between religious and secular domains.

For example, over one-third of schools are designated "faith schools" even though they are almost entirely funded by the tax-payer. Using the 'ethos' argument, they want to block admissions of LGBT pupils or the appointment of staff - even non-teaching staff - of the 'wrong' sexual orientation.

The Charity sector has similar issues.

And now there is a more worrying development.

Religious groups are lobbying for a "conscience clause" whereby people of certain convictions would be allowed to refuse service to same-sex couples. An example cited is a hotelier refusing a room to a gay couple. In 2008, a registrar in London brought a case against her council employers because she was required to perform civil partnership registrations in the course of her duties.

Evangelical preacher, George Hargreaves, leads a rally outside the House of Lords to demand exemptions from anti-discrimination laws ensuring equal treatment for gays and lesbians.

